

MPJO-500*

Ethics in Journalism

Tuesday 7:40-10:10 PM, STM 120 St. Mary's bldg.

#16 on map: <http://maps.georgetown.edu/index.cfm?Action=View&MapID=3>

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Office Hours: by appointment, available before and after class.

- **What does it mean for you as a communications professional to live a moral life?**
- **What factors influence the stands you take on ethical and social issues?**
- **How do you go about deciding what is the right action to take when faced with compelling arguments pro and con?**
- **How do you evaluate and interact with competing value systems in a pluralistic world?**

The MPS program aims to educate the whole person and believes that this process starts with the study of ethics. This course will focus on the application of moral philosophy and professional standards to the practice of journalism. Ethical decision-making is to be recognized and embraced as a fundamental journalism skill. Looking at ethics through a professional lens, this course asks students to explore their own values and challenges them to codify and commit to their own code of ethics in relationship to professional codes of conduct and best practices. Students will gain a solid foundation in ethics and relate what they learn to their own professional situation through class discussions, case studies, and guest lectures conducted by Georgetown University ethicists as well as communications professionals. This course is required for all MPS students and must be completed by the second semester in the program.

***Syllabus subject to change**

Pls. find a "buddy" in the class so that if you miss anything you can contact that person. While we are usually available on e-mail, it is for intellectual questions and not logistics. The syllabus will be on Blackboard.

PLEASE SIGN UP to receive by email: *Everyday Ethics*

<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=67>

Required Text:

Malcolm, Janet, The Journalist and the Murderer, Vintage, 1990.

Patterson, Phillip and Wilkins, Lee, Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, (4th edition), McGraw Hill, 2004.

Shepard, Alicia, (2006) Woodward and Bernstein: Life in the Shadow of Watergate, Wiley & Sons.

Suggested Text:

Tom Rosenstiel and Amy S. Mitchell, (2003) "Thinking Clearly: Cases in Journalistic Decision-Making," Columbia University Press. ISBN 0-231-12588-7

Suggested Additional Resources:

Poynter Ethics Page: <http://www.poynter.org/subject.asp?id=32>

Society of Professional Journalists http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp

Organization of Newspaper Ombudsmen <http://www.newsombudsmen.org/>

Committee of Concerned Journalists homepage <http://www.journalism.org/>

Minnesota News Council homepage <http://www.mtn.org/~newscncl>

RTNDA ethics code (TV and Radio) <http://www.rtnda.org/ethics/coe.html>

Romenesko (stories abt journalism) <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45>

Journalism.org <http://www.journalism.org/resources/tools/ethics/codes>

National Press Photographer's Association Code of Ethics

http://nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html

Ethics in the Age of Digital Photography

http://nppa.org/professional_development/self-training_resources/eadp_report/index.html

The Elements of Moral Philosophy by James Rachels (third edition)

Groping for Ethics in Journalism by Ron F. Smith (fourth edition)

Doing Ethics in Journalism by Jay Black, Ally & Bacon (third edition)

Grades:

Your satisfactory completion of course requirements will indicate your achievement of course objectives stated above. You will be graded on:

- Attendance and Participation
- Demonstration of Mastery of Readings
- Group Theorist Presentation
- Clear-cut Ethical Issue paper (2-3 pages)
- Your Code of Ethics: Paper (7-10 pages)
- Your Code of Ethics: Presentation

Because there are only 10 classes, it is imperative that you **DO NOT MISS CLASS**. If you miss 2 or more classes, you will get an automatic C.

Honor System

Students are expected to abide by the Georgetown University Honor System. If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the material and information posted on the Honor Council's website: <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/index.html>

Georgetown University Honor Pledge

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: to be honest in any

academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Academic Resource Center

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

Assignments:

All written work is to be typed, double-spaced, with a 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Please use APA format. Late work is not acceptable. If you have special circumstances, please contact me before the due date to discuss alternatives.

Group Theorist Presentation: See below.

Clear-cut Ethical Issue paper (2-3 pages) Take a simple, clear-cut ethical challenge in the news recently and discuss what the issue is and what you think should have happened. Where did the person/institution go wrong and why? Best bet for finding an issue is Poynter's Romenesko site <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45>, which aggregates every story related to the news business.

Final Paper: (7-10 pages) A handout will be given on how to do this paper.

Class Schedule

JUNE 3: (Shepard & Jenkins)

In Class: Introductions, Review the syllabus; SPJ code of ethics, Journalism's mission. Ethics Case.

Reading for next class: Read Chapter 1 in *Media Ethics*.

Assignment: Group Theorist Presentation: You will join with a small group of peers to research and present an ethical dilemma that your group deems to be relevant as viewed through the lens of a significant ethics theorist. You will have fifteen minutes to provide background on the theory or point of view most closely associated with this individual as well as his/her bio, placing the theorist in historical and cultural context. What approach and/or stand would someone following that particular theory be likely to take in regards to resolving the issue you've introduced? During the last five minutes, you will co-lead with your group a brief discussion on your presentation with the class. Powerpoint suggested but not required. Prepare a one-page summary as class handout. **Due date will be assigned when groups are decided. Presentations will begin on June 17-July 15.**

JUNE 10: (Jenkins)

Class: Introduction to Ethical Decision Making, The Washington Post Code of Business Conduct, Discuss Reading

Reading for next class: Chapters 2 & 4 in *Media Ethics*.

JUNE 17: (Shepard)

Class: Group Theorist Presentations; Discuss reading

Reading for next class: Chapter 9 in *Media Ethics*.

DUE: Ethical Challenge short paper due

JUNE 24: (Jenkins)

Class: Group Theorist Presentations; Discuss reading

Reading for next class: Chapter 10 in *Media Ethics*.

JULY 1: (Jenkins)

Class: Group Theorist Presentations; Discuss reading

Reading for next class: Chapter 6 & 8 in *Media Ethics*.

JULY 8: (Shepard)

Class: Group Theorist Presentations; Discuss reading

Reading for next class: Chapter 7 in *Media Ethics*.

JULY 15: (Jenkins)

Class: Group Theorist Presentations; Guest presenter; Discuss reading

Reading for next class: *The Journalist and the Murder/Woodward & Bernstein*

JULY 22: (Guest lecturer)

Reading for next class: *The Journalist and the Murder*

JULY 29: (Shepard)

Class: Discuss *The Journalist and the Murder*

Final Paper Due

“Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people’s vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse.” Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*

Reading for next class: Finish *Woodward & Bernstein*. Come to class with at least TWO ethical dilemmas Woodward, Bernstein or any other players at the *Washington Post* faced.

AUGUST 5: (Shepard)

Class: Discuss: *Woodward & Bernstein*

Presentation of Ethics papers to the class

10 QUESTIONS FOR AN ETHICAL DECISION (Bob Steele, Poynter Institute)

1. What do I know? What do I need to know?
2. What is my journalistic purpose?
3. What are my ethical concerns?
4. What organizational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?
5. How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process?
6. Who are the stakeholders -- those affected by my decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate?
7. What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel if I were in the shoes of one of the stakeholders?
8. What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short term? Long term?
9. What are my alternatives to maximize my truth telling responsibility and minimize harm?
10. Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?

TEN MORE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

1. What do I THINK I know? Why? How do I VERIFY that these things are true?
2. Would I want to do this story even if my byline was not used? Why? Why not? What do I hope to prove? Why?
3. Am I the really the best person to do this story? Do I have the expertise or access to the expertise that will ensure I've been thorough and not missed important details or inconsistencies? How will my own views affect the questions I ask or the way in which I interpret what I find?

4. Which ethics guideline/policy will most apply as I set about to report this story? Which guideline/policy will be hardest to follow as I set about doing this story? Why?

5. Where can I go to find the opposite and middle positions? How did (do) I find those sources? How do I ensure they are legitimate and what criteria am I using to weigh the importance of what they say to me?

6. Who or what gave me the idea for this story/photo? (If given the idea:) Who pays their salary? What does their employer have to gain? How much "help" have they offered? Is there a chance I am being manipulated and don't know it?

7. Have I followed the money completely and thoroughly? Have I explored both the obvious and the hidden ownership issues? How difficult is it to follow or find out about these ownership issues? Why?

8. Who benefits/who gets hurt if my story turns out to be false or misleading?

Who is the victim if my report turns out to be false or misleading? Who has most to gain from hurting that person?

9. What safeguards do I practice or can implement that will increase my objectivity and ability to judge what to report in this story? What does my gut say about this story?

10. What is my justification for this story? Would (insert respected competitor's name) have done this story even if they knew it could turn out wrong? Would my (parents|brother(s)|sister(s)|mentor|) believe I had good reasons to do this story even if it turns out to be false or misleading?

END